

Introduction

In a phrase of Hermann Cohen, Maimonides is the "classic of rationalism" in Judaism. This phrase appears to us to be correct in a stricter sense than Cohen may have intended: Maimonides' rationalism is the true natural model, the standard to be carefully protected from any distortion, and thus the stumbling-block on which modern rationalism falls. To awaken a prejudice in favor of this view of Maimonides and, even more, to arouse suspicion against the powerful opposing prejudice, is the aim of the present work.

Even if one is free of all natural inclination towards the past, even if one believes that the present, as the age in which man has attained the highest rung yet of his self-consciousness, can really learn nothing from the past, one still encounters Maimonides's teaching as soon as one seriously attempts to make up one's mind about the present so assessed. For such an attempt can succeed only if one continually confronts modern rationalism, as the source of the present, with medieval rationalism. But if one undertakes a confrontation of this kind seriously, and thus in the freedom of the question which of the two opposed rationalisms is the true rationalism, then medieval rationalism, whose "classic" for us is Maimonides, changes in the course of the investigation from a mere means of discerning more sharply the specific character of modern rationalism into the

standard measured against which the latter proves to be only a semblance of rationalism. And thus the self-evident starting-point, that self-knowledge is a necessary and meaningful undertaking for the present, acquires an unself-evident justification: the critique of the present, the critique of modern rationalism¹ as the critique of modern sophistry, is the necessary beginning, the constant companion, and the unerring sign of that search for truth which is possible in our time.

The present situation of Judaism—leaving aside, therefore, the fundamental constitution of Judaism, which is not affected in or by this situation—is determined by the Enlightenment. For all phenomena peculiar to the present—if one does not let oneself be deceived by their foregrounds and pretenses—refer back to the Enlightenment, that is, to the movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries initiated by Descartes' *Meditations* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*, as their source. This fact is hard to contest; only its bearing and significance are, certainly, contestable. The premises about which the present is at one with the Age of Enlightenment have now become so self-evident that it is only or chiefly the opposition between the Enlightenment and the present that tends to be remarked and taken seriously: the Enlightenment appears long since to have been "overcome"; its legitimate concerns, which have now become "trivial," appear to have been taken into account; its "shallowness," on the other hand, appears to have fallen into deserved contempt. How remote from our age is the quarrel about the verbal inspiration vs. the merely human origin of Scripture; about the reality vs. the impossibility of the Biblical miracles; about the eternity and thus the immutability vs. the historical variability of the Law; about the creation of the world vs. the eternity of the world: all discussions are now conducted on a level on which the great controversial questions debated by the Enlightenment and orthodoxy no longer even need to be posed, and must ultimately even be rejected as "falsely posed." If the matter could be left at that, the influence of the Enlightenment on Judaism would

be in fact as unworthy of serious reflection and care as it is taken to be not, indeed, by all contemporary men, but certainly by all contemporary "movements." But are the premises of the Enlightenment really trivial? Is the Enlightenment really a contemptible adversary?

If, however, the foundation of the Jewish tradition is belief in the creation of the world, in the reality of the Biblical miracles, in the absolutely binding character and essential immutability of the Law, resting on the revelation at Sinai, then one must say that the Enlightenment has undermined the foundation of the Jewish tradition. Indeed from the very beginning it was with complete consciousness and complete purposefulness that the radical Enlightenment—think of Spinoza—did this. And as far as the moderate Enlightenment is concerned, it had to pay for its attempt to mediate between orthodoxy and radical enlightenment, between belief in revelation and belief in the self-sufficiency of reason, with the contempt from which it cannot now be rescued even by the greatest fairness of historical judgment. Later thinkers, who saw that the attack of Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, Voltaire, Reimarus could not be warded off with the defenses of a Moses Mendelssohn, began by giving their support to the radical Enlightenment as opposed to orthodoxy; thus they began by accepting all real or supposed conclusions and all explicit or implicit premises of the critique of miracles and the critique of the Bible; but in their own view they then re-established the foundation of the tradition through the counter-attack they raised against the (radical) Enlightenment. In other words, the later thinkers, who recognized that any compromise between orthodoxy and the Enlightenment is untenable, accomplished the move from the level on which the Enlightenment and orthodoxy had done battle, and on which the moderate Enlightenment had striven for a compromise, to another, a "higher" level, which as such made possible a synthesis of Enlightenment and orthodoxy. Thus it was on this newly won level that the later thinkers re-established the foundation of the tradition—of course, as cannot be

otherwise in a synthesis, in a modified, "internalized" form. But it is not at all difficult to see that the "internalizing" of concepts like creation, miracles, and revelation robs these concepts of their whole meaning. The "internalizing" of these concepts differs from the disavowal of their meaning only in the well-intentioned, if not good, purpose of its authors. If God did not create the world in the "external" sense, if He did not really create it, if the creation therefore cannot be affirmed theoretically—as simply true, as the fact of creation—then one must in all probity disavow the creation, or, at the very least, avoid any talk of creation. But all "internalizations" of the basic tenets of the tradition rest at bottom on this: from the "reflexive" premise, from the "higher" level of the post-Enlightenment synthesis, the relation of God to nature is no longer intelligible and thus is no longer even interesting.

That the "internalizations" which are so common today are in truth disavowals—this fact, manifest to the impartial view, is obscured only by the circumstance that at the outset—that is, so long as we do not purposely struggle against our own prejudices through historical reflection—we find ourselves fully in the power of the mode of thought produced by the Enlightenment and consolidated by its proponents or opponents. This partiality comes to light especially in the way in which the "internalization" of the basic tenets of the Jewish tradition has been justified. There is no "internalization" of this kind for whose innocence one cannot discover and bring forward as witness some statement or other of some traditional authority or other. But—even ignoring completely the unprincipled way in which statements torn from their context are often brought forward as conclusive testimony—such really after-the-fact defenses depend upon one of the two following errors, or upon both at once. First, one appeals against the orthodox, "external" view to such witnesses as belong to an undeveloped stage of the formulation of belief. In this way one can protect oneself, for example, against the doctrines of verbal inspiration, the creation as creation *ex nihilo*, and

the immortality of the individual. But whenever these doctrines first emerged historically, they stand in a connection of such manifest necessity with the doctrines about whose Biblical origin there is no quarrel that one can hardly doubt them if one intends to remain in harmony with the "religion of the prophets." By appealing against the completed expression of the Jewish tradition to those very elements that stand in the foreground in the Bible, and especially in the latter prophets, one is following the method of the Enlightenment, which has been acknowledged especially by "religious liberalism" as authoritative. This fact is generally recognized, and insofar as liberalism has latterly fallen into disrepute, partly on very good and partly on very bad grounds, the biblicist or historical-critical method of "overcoming" orthodoxy is less and less in use. Second, one appeals against orthodoxy to extreme statements that have been ventured within the Jewish tradition. In this way one can protect oneself, for example, against the doctrine of the absolute immutability of the law and the doctrine of miracles. But—however well attested and however often repeated an extreme statement may be—it is one thing to have a very "bold," very "free" statement which, being meant as a daring venture, has a solid basis in the beliefs in creation, miracles, and revelation that permit it in the first place, and which therefore, according to its own meaning, is erroneous and even preposterous when separated from this basis; it is quite another thing to use a statement grounded in this way as a foundation. Now, insofar as one makes an extreme statement—like the peak of a pyramid—into the foundation of the Jewish tradition, one again shows that one is altogether partial to the Enlightenment's mode of thought. For precisely this is characteristic of the Enlightenment: that, in its supposedly or only ostensibly "immanent" criticism and development of the tradition, it makes extremes of the tradition into the foundation of a position that is actually completely incompatible with the tradition.²

If therefore it must be insisted that the "internalizing"

of the basic tenets of the tradition robs these tenets of their meaning; if therefore it turns out that not only every compromise between orthodoxy and Enlightenment, but also every synthesis of these opposed positions, is finally untenable; if therefore the alternative "orthodoxy or Enlightenment" may today no longer, or rather, may today not yet be evaded; then one must first of all, and at the very least, climb back down onto the level of the classical quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy, as onto a level on which battle was done and could be done about the one, eternal truth, since the natural desire for truth had not yet been stifled by the newer dogma that "religion" and "science" each has in view the "truth" belonging to it. In order to reach this level, one need not even withdraw very far from the magic circle of the present: the radical Enlightenment still lives today, and it is in a certain way, viz. as regards its last and furthest consequences, far more radical today than in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and orthodoxy too still lives today. The quarrel between orthodoxy and the Enlightenment that is thus possible without further ado must be resumed—or rather, as one recognizes if one does not intentionally shut one's eyes, the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy, already longstanding and still ever-continuing, must be understood anew.

But has not the demand for a resumption or a re-understanding of this quarrel long since been tacitly fulfilled? Why then stir up yet again what at long, long last has become calm? Is not the critique of the "internalizations," to which that demand is chiefly due, a forcing of an open door? Did not the movement whose goal is to return to the tradition, the movement whose exemplary and unforgotten expression was the development, if not the teaching, of Hermann Cohen—did not that movement have as its actual, though often hidden, impulse precisely the insight into the questionableness of the "internalizations" with which the nineteenth century generally contented itself? Has not the situation of Judaism, thanks to that movement,

changed from the ground up in the course of the last generation?—That the situation of Judaism has changed as a result of the return movement must be admitted; that it has changed from the ground up must be contested. It has not changed from the ground up³ precisely because, in the entire course of the return movement, there has not ensued a fundamental reflection on the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy, a fundamental review of the results of this quarrel. And yet nothing would have been more urgent, within the meaning of that very movement, than such reflection and review. It was not without reservation that the return to the tradition was carried out by precisely the most important advocates of this movement. To the end, Cohen raised explicit reservations against the tradition in the name of freedom, of man's autonomy. And Franz Rosenzweig, who, in a sense at least, went even further on the road of Cohen than Cohen himself, left no doubt that he could adopt neither the traditional belief in immortality nor the view of the Law allegedly peculiar to contemporary German orthodoxy. These or related reservations,⁴—which, as one immediately recognizes on a closer view, and as Cohen and Rosenzweig did not hesitate to admit, are of Enlightenment origin—would require, precisely because the return to the tradition claims to stand in relationship with a “new thinking,” a coherent and fundamental justification from the new basis. And one dare not assert that they have received such a justification—which would be, in the nature of the case, also a partial justification of the Enlightenment—in such a way as to satisfy reasonable demands. Rather, the return to the tradition was carried out in discussion only with the post-Enlightenment synthesis, especially with Hegel.⁵ It was believed that one could dismiss any direct and thematic discussion with the Enlightenment, since it was assumed—logically, in the sense of the “overcome” [überwunden] Hegelianism—that with the “overcoming” of Hegelianism one had simultaneously “overcome” the Enlightenment which Hegelianism had “transcended” [aufgehoben]. In truth, however, the critique of

Hegelianism had actually led, in the nature of the case, to a rehabilitation of the Enlightenment. For what, if not a rehabilitation of the Enlightenment, was the critique of the "internalizations" carried out in the nineteenth century, especially among the successors of Lessing—the critique on which the return to the tradition depended? If the tenets of the tradition have also and especially an "external" sense, then the attack of the Enlightenment, which had aimed only at the "externally" understood tenets of the tradition—against their "inner" sense Hobbes, Spinoza, Voltaire wrote and would have written not a single line—was not based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the tradition. This fact should have been admitted and emphasized, and, since part of the Enlightenment's critique of the tradition was being accepted in a way that was not fundamentally clear, it should also have been admitted and emphasized that the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy was not only not meaningless but had not even been dealt with. But all those who have attentively observed the movement under discussion can testify that neither the one fact nor the other has been admitted and emphasized.⁶ Thus, precisely in case the motive of this movement is justified, it is most important that the classic quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy be resumed and re-understood.

For this quarrel has by no means been made groundless by the so-called "victory" of the Enlightenment over orthodoxy. One would have to be of the opinion that world history, that just the history of two or three hundred years, is the final judgment; whereas in truth, as the Enlightenment itself still knew, victories are "very ambiguous evidences of the just cause, or rather . . . none at all," and thus "he who wins and he who should have won" are "very seldom one and the same person."⁷ So if the object is to discriminate between the party that has won—the Enlightenment—and the party that should have won—presumably, according to Lessing's rule, orthodoxy; if, in other words, the object is to carry out a critique of the victory of the Enlightenment over orthodoxy, then one must, as

things stand, drag out the dusty books that are to be considered the classical documents of the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy. And yes, one must hear the arguments of both parties. Only by doing this, or more precisely, only by having the full course of that quarrel before one's eyes, may one hope to be able to attain a view of the hidden premises of both parties that is not corrupted by prejudices, and thus a principled judgment of right and wrong in their quarrel.⁸

The critical examination of the arguments and counterarguments brought forward in this quarrel leads to the conclusion that there can be no question of a refutation of the "externally" understood basic tenets of the tradition. For all these tenets rest on the irrefutable premise that God is omnipotent and His will unfathomable. If God is omnipotent, then miracles and revelations in general, and in particular the Biblical miracles and revelations, are possible. Of course for orthodoxy, and therefore also for the Enlightenment, it is a question not so much of the possibility or impossibility as of the reality or unreality of the Biblical miracles and revelations; but in fact almost all the Enlightenment's attempts to demonstrate the unreality of the Biblical miracles and revelations depend on the express or tacit premise that the impossibility of miracles and revelations in general is established or demonstrable. Yet in carrying out their critique, precisely the most radical Enlighteners learned—if not as something clearly known, then at least as something vividly felt—that as a consequence of the irrefutability of orthodoxy's ultimate premise, all individual assertions resting on this premise are unshakable. Nothing shows more clearly that this is the case than the main weapon which they employed, and which they handled so adeptly, so masterfully, that it—it alone, one might say—decided the victory of the Enlightenment over orthodoxy. This weapon is mockery. As Lessing, who was in a position to know, put it, they attempted by means of mockery to "laugh" orthodoxy out of a position from which it could not be dislodged by any proofs supplied by Scripture or even by

reason. Thus the Enlightenment's mockery of the teachings of the tradition is not the successor of a prior refutation of these teachings; it does not bring to expression the amazement of unprejudiced men at the power of manifestly absurd prejudices; but it *is* the refutation: it is in mockery that the liberation from "prejudices" that had supposedly been already cast off is actually first accomplished; at the very least, the mockery is the admittedly supplementary but still decisive legitimation of a liberty acquired by whatsoever means.⁹ Thus the importance of mockery for the Enlightenment's critique of religion is an indirect proof of the irrefutability of orthodoxy. As a result, orthodoxy was able to survive the attack of the Enlightenment, and all later attacks and retreats, unchanged in its essence.¹⁰

But, although the Enlightenment's attack on orthodoxy failed, the battle of the two hostile powers has still had a highly consequential positive result for the Enlightenment: the Enlightenment has succeeded, one may say provisionally, in defending itself, for its part, against the attack of orthodoxy. Even if—to cite an example that is more than an example—it could not prove the impossibility or the unreality of miracles, it could demonstrate the unknowability of miracles as such, and thus protect itself against the claims of orthodoxy. Thus, what is true of the Enlightenment's offensive criticism is not true of its defensive criticism. Through the quarrel between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy it became more clearly and easily recognized than it had been before that the premises of orthodoxy—the reality of creation, miracles, and revelation—are not known (philosophically or historically) but only believed, and that they therefore do not have the binding character peculiar to the known. And not only that: whereas pre-Enlightenment science was in a certain harmony with the doctrines of belief, the new science, which proved itself in the battle against orthodoxy, if it did not indeed have its very *raison d'être* in that battle, stood in often concealed but, at bottom, always active and thus always re-emerging opposition to belief. Thus the emergence of the new science brought it

about that fundamental teachings of the tradition, deemed knowable by the premises of the older science, were now considered more and more to be merely believed. The undermining of natural theology and of natural right, which was prepared, to say the least, in the Age of Enlightenment, is the most important example, indeed the specific sign, of this development. The final result is that unbelieving science and belief no longer have, as in the Middle Ages, the common ground of natural knowledge, on which a meaningful quarrel between belief and unbelief is possible, but rather any understanding of even the possibility of an opposition between them was on the verge of being lost. Orthodoxy actually had no share in the world created by the Enlightenment and its heirs, the world of "modern culture"; if it remained true to itself, it did not even have access to this world; it survived the nineteenth century as a misunderstood relic of a forgotten past, more despised than wondered at.

Thus the Enlightenment was not distracted from the construction of its world by the failure of its attack on orthodoxy. One must rather say that it was forced into constructing a world by this very failure. For it would not rest content with dismissing the tenets of orthodoxy as not known but merely believed; having been impressed by the claim of these tenets, it wanted to refute them. But the tenets that the world is the creation of the omnipotent God, that miracles are therefore possible in it, that man is in need of revelation for the guidance of his life, cannot be refuted by experience or by the principle of contradiction; for neither does experience speak against the guidance of the world and of man by an unfathomable God, nor does the concept of an unfathomable God contain a contradiction within itself. Thus if one wished to refute orthodoxy, there remained no other way but to attempt to prove that the world and life are perfectly intelligible without the assumption of an unfathomable God. That is, the refutation of orthodoxy required the success of a system. Man had to establish himself theoretically and practically as master of

the world and master of his life; the world created by him had to erase the world merely "given" to him; then orthodoxy would be more than refuted—it would be "outlived." Animated by the hope of being able to "overcome" orthodoxy through the perfection of a system, and hence hardly noticing the failure of its actual attack on orthodoxy, the Enlightenment, striving for victory with truly Napoleonic strategy, left the impregnable fortress of orthodoxy in the rear, telling itself that the enemy would not and could not venture any sally. Renouncing the impossible direct refutation of orthodoxy, it devoted itself to its own proper work, the civilization of the world and of man. And if this work had prospered, then perhaps there would have been no need for further proof of the justice of the Enlightenment's victory over orthodoxy; indeed as long as it did seem to prosper, it was believed that no further proof was needed. But doubts about the success of civilization soon became doubts about the possibility of civilization. Finally the belief is perishing that man can, by pushing back the "limits of Nature" further and further, advance to ever greater "freedom," that he can "subjugate" nature, "prescribe his own laws" for her, "generate" her by dint of pure thought. What is left, in the end, of the success of the Enlightenment? What finally proves to be the foundation and the vindication of this success?

The Enlightenment's critique of orthodoxy, in spite of its opposite appearance, is in truth purely defensive; it rests upon the radical renunciation of a refutation of orthodoxy; not the impossibility but only the unknowability of miracles was proven by the Enlightenment. More precisely: the unknowability of miracles on the premises of the new natural science. Thus the new natural science appears to be the proper vindication of the Enlightenment. In fact it cannot be disputed that the decisive thing for the Enlightenment's success was in the first place the belief that the science of Galileo, Descartes and Newton had refuted the science of Aristotle and the "natural world-view" explicated by it, which is also the "world-view" of the Bible. This success

was only delayed, not called into question, by the harmonizations between the "modern world-view" and the Bible which proliferated especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and which are often enough attempted even today; for ultimately these harmonizations always function as vehicles of Enlightenment, not as dams against it: the moderate Enlightenment is the best preparation of the soil for the radical Enlightenment. The new natural science, made acceptable by the moderate Enlightenment, entered upon its triumphant progress as the confederate and scout of the radical Enlightenment. But the new science itself could not long maintain the claim to have brought to light the truth about the world "in itself;" the "idealistic" interpretation of it was already latent in it from its beginning.¹¹ Modern "idealism"—perfected on the one hand in the discovery of the "aesthetic" as the purest insight into the creativity of man and, on the other hand, in the discovery of the radical "historicity" of man and his world as the definitive overcoming of the idea of an eternal nature, an eternal truth—finally understands modern natural science as one historically contingent form of "world-construction" among others; thus it makes possible the rehabilitation of the "natural world-view" on which the Bible depends. As soon as modern "idealism" has fully won out, the victory of the Enlightenment over orthodoxy thereby forfeits its originally decisive justification: the proof of the unknowability of miracles as such becomes invalid. For it is only under the premise of modern natural science that miracles are unknowable as such. So long as this science stood firm as the single way to the one truth, one could lull oneself with the view, certified by historical research, that the assertion of miracles is relative to the pre-scientific stage of mankind and thus has no dignity. But in the end it turns out that the facts certifying this view allow of the opposite interpretation: Is it not, ultimately, the very intention of defending oneself radically against miracles which is the basis of the concept of science that guides modern natural science? Was not the "unique" "world-construction" of mod-

ern natural science, according to which miracles are of course unknowable, devised expressly for the very purpose that miracles *be* unknowable, and that thus man be defended against the grip of the omnipotent God?

Thus modern natural science could be the basis or the instrument of the Enlightenment's victory over orthodoxy only so long as the old concept of truth, which it itself had already shaken, still ruled men's minds and, in particular, determined their conception of modern natural science. There was only one reason why it was temporarily possible to attempt to ground the modern ideal, the ideal of civilization, by means of natural science: it was believed that the new concept of nature was the adequate foundation of the new ideal precisely because the old concept of nature had been the adequate foundation of the old ideal. But this was a delusion. It had yet to be ascertained that the "end-free" and "value-free" nature of modern natural science can say nothing to man about "ends and values," that the "Is," understood in the sense of modern natural science, involves no reference at all to the "Ought," and that therefore the traditional view that the right life is a life according to nature becomes meaningless under the modern premise.¹² Hence, if modern natural science cannot justify the modern ideal, and if there is nonetheless unmistakably a relation between the modern ideal and modern natural science, one sees oneself compelled to ask whether it is not, on the contrary, the modern ideal that is in truth the basis of modern natural science, and thus whether it is not precisely a new belief rather than the new knowledge that justifies the Enlightenment.

If the question is posed in this latter form, it loses the disreputability that understandably clings to the question of the moral source of modern natural science. For even the most devout adherents of this science concede that the arrival of a new ideal, a new conception of the right life for man—even if only secondary to the success of natural science—was decisive for the victory of the Enlightenment over orthodoxy. And in fact, in their view, the meaning of

this ideal amounts to the ideal of freedom as the autonomy of man and his culture. But this view can be maintained only if one confuses "freedom" understood as autonomy with the "freedom" of conscience, the "freedom" of philosophizing, political "freedom," or the philosophic tradition's ideal of autarky. Freedom as the autonomy of man and his culture is neither the original nor the final justification of the Enlightenment. This ideal was viable, rather, only during a peaceful interlude: in the interlude when the battle against orthodoxy seemed to have been fought out, while the revolt of the forces unchained by the Enlightenment had not yet broken out against their liberator; when, living in a comfortable house, one could no longer see the foundation on which the house had been erected,—in this epoch, after the decisive entry into the state of civilization, one could forget the state of nature, which alone was capable of legitimating civilization, and hence, in place of the primary ideal of civilization as the self-assertion of man against overpowering nature, one could set up the "higher" ideal of culture as the sovereign creation of the spirit. The Jewish tradition gives a more adequate answer than the philosophy of culture to the question of the original ideal of the Enlightenment. The Jewish tradition characterized defection from the Law, rebellion against the Law, in most, if not all, cases as Epicureanism. Whatever facts, impressions or suspicions led the rabbis to this characterization, this description of defection, it is corroborated by historical investigation of the original Epicureanism. Epicurus is truly the classic of the critique of religion. Like no other, his whole philosophy presupposes the fear of superhuman forces and of death as the danger threatening the happiness and repose of man; indeed, this philosophy is hardly anything but the classical means of allaying the fear of divinity [Numen] and death by showing them to be "empty of content." The influence of the Epicurean critique on the Enlightenment comes to light if one follows the tracks of the Enlightenment step by step from its beginnings down to Anatole France: the Epicurean critique is the foundation, or more

exactly the foreground, of the Enlightenment critique. The Epicurean critique thus undergoes an essential change in the age of the Enlightenment. Of course for the Enlightenment too, and just precisely for the Enlightenment, it is a question of man's happiness, his peace of mind, which is threatened preeminently or exclusively by religious ideas. But the Enlightenment understands this happy peace, this tranquillity, in a fundamentally different way from the original Epicureanism—it understands “tranquillity” in such a way that the civilization, the subjection, the improvement of nature, and particularly of human nature, becomes indispensable for its sake. While the battle of the Epicureans against the terrifying delusion of religion was aimed preeminently at the terror of this delusion, the Enlightenment aimed preeminently at the delusoriness itself: regardless of whether the religious ideas are terrifying or comforting—qua delusions, they cheat men of the real goods, of the enjoyment of the real goods; they steer men away from the real “this world” to an imaginary “other world,” and thus seduce them into letting themselves be cheated of the possession and enjoyment of the real, “this-worldly” goods by the greedy clergy, who “live” from those delusions. Liberated from the religious delusion, awakened to sober awareness of his real situation, taught by bad experiences that he is threatened by a stingy, hostile nature, man recognizes as his sole salvation and duty not so much “to cultivate his garden” as in the first place to plant himself a “garden” by making himself the master and owner of nature. This “crude” conception has long since been “overcome,” of course, by a conception which completely exposes the self-proclaiming and self-betraying tendency in the transformation of Epicureanism into the Enlightenment. The latest and purest expression of this is that the religious ideas are rejected not because they are terrifying but because they are desirable, because they are comforting: religion is not a tool which man has forged for dark reasons in order to torment himself, to make life unnecessarily difficult, but rather a way out chosen for very obvious reasons,

in order to escape the terror and the hopelessness of life, which cannot be eradicated by any progress of civilization, in order to make his life easier. A new kind of fortitude, which forbids itself every flight from the horror of life into comforting delusion, which accepts the eloquent descriptions of the misery of man without God as a proof of the goodness of its cause, reveals itself eventually as the ultimate and purest ground for the rebellion against the tradition of the revelation. This new fortitude, being the willingness to look man's forsakenness in its face, being the courage to welcome the terrible truth, being toughness against the inclination of man to deceive himself about his situation, is probity.¹³ It is this probity, "intellectual probity," that bids us reject all attempts to "mediate" between the Enlightenment and orthodoxy—both those of the moderate Enlightenment and especially those of the post-Enlightenment synthesis—not only as inadequate, but also and especially as without probity; it forces the alternative "Enlightenment or orthodoxy" and, since it believes it finds the deepest unprobity in the principles of the tradition itself, it bids us to renounce the very word "God." This atheism with a good conscience, or even with a bad conscience, differs precisely by its conscientiousness, its morality, from the conscienceless atheism at which the past shuddered; the "Epicurean," who became an "idealist" in the persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who, instead of being willing to "live in hiding" safely, learned to fight and die for honor and truth, finally becomes the "atheist" who rejects for reasons of conscience the belief in God. Thus it becomes clear that this atheism, compared not only with the original Epicureanism but also with the generally "radical" atheism of the age of Enlightenment, is a descendant of the tradition grounded in the Bible: it accepts the thesis, the negation of the Enlightenment, on the basis of a way of thinking which became possible only through the Bible. Although it refuses, since it is unwilling to disguise its unbelief in any way, to represent itself as a "synthesis" of the Enlightenment and orthodoxy, yet it itself is

the latest, most radical, most unassailable harmonization of these opposed positions. This atheism, the heir and judge of the belief in revelation, of the centuries-old, millennia-old struggle between belief and unbelief, and finally of the short-lived but by no means therefore inconsequential romantic longing for the lost belief, confronting orthodoxy in complex sophistication formed out of gratitude, rebellion, longing and indifference, and also in simple probity, is according to its own claim as capable of an original understanding of the human roots of the belief in God as no earlier, no less complex-simple philosophy ever was. The last word and the ultimate justification of the Enlightenment is the atheism stemming from probity, which overcomes orthodoxy radically by understanding it radically, free of both the polemical bitterness of the Enlightenment and the equivocal reverence of romanticism.

Thus at last the "truth" of the alternative "orthodoxy or Enlightenment" is revealed as the alternative "orthodoxy or atheism." Orthodoxy, with its hostile eye, recognized from early on, from the beginning, that this is the case. Now it is no longer contested even by the enemies of orthodoxy. The situation thus formed, the present situation, appears to be insoluble for the Jew who cannot be orthodox and who must consider purely political Zionism, the only "solution of the Jewish problem" possible on the basis of atheism, as a resolution that is indeed highly honorable but not, in earnest and in the long run, adequate. This situation not only appears insoluble but actually is so, as long as one clings to the modern premises. If finally there is in the modern world only the alternative "orthodoxy or atheism," and if on the other hand the need for an enlightened Judaism is urgent, then one sees oneself compelled to ask whether enlightenment is necessarily modern enlightenment. Thus one sees oneself induced—provided one does not know from the outset, as one cannot know from the outset, that only new, unheard-of, ultra-modern thoughts can resolve our perplexity—to apply for aid to the medieval Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of Maimonides.

But has not the Enlightenment of Maimonides long since been overcome? Is it not the precursor and model of just that moderate Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that was least able to stand its ground? Is it not even altogether more "radical" in many respects, more dangerous to the spirit of Judaism, than the modern Enlightenment? Is it not based on the irretrievable Aristotelian cosmology? Does it not stand or fall with the dubious allegorical method of interpretation? Is not the modern Enlightenment therefore, with all its questionable-ness, still preferable to the medieval?

It would be unpardonable to ignore these or similar doubts. Rather than discuss them thoroughly point by point, which would be possible only in the framework of an interpretation of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, we shall attempt in what follows to point out the leading idea of the medieval Enlightenment that has become lost to the modern Enlightenment and its heirs, and through an understanding of which many modern certainties and doubts lose their force: the idea of Law.

Notes

Introduction

1. "Irrationalism" is just a variety of modern rationalism, which in itself is already "irrationalistic" enough.

2. Cf., e.g., Spinoza's justification of his antinomianism by recourse to the statement that man is in the hand of God as clay in the hand of the potter; cf. my work *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, Berlin 1930, 191 ff. The assertion made in the text is intended in a more comprehensive sense than may at first appear. It extends also to the philosophic tradition, where it signifies the following: To the Enlightenment—insofar as it is more than a restoration of older positions—it is essential to make extremes of the tradition (or polemics against extremes of the tradition) into the foundation of a position that is completely incompatible with the tradition. The Enlightenment's aim was the rehabilitation of the natural through the denial (or limitation) of the supernatural, but what it accomplished was the discovery of a new "natural" foundation which, so far from being natural, is rather the residue, as it were, of the "supernatural." The extreme possibilities and claims discovered by the founders of the religious as well as the philosophical tradition by starting from the natural and the typical became, at the outset of modernity, self-evident and in this sense "natural"; hence they are no longer regarded as extremes requiring a radical demonstration, but themselves serve as a "natural" foundation for the negation or re-interpretation not only of the supernatural but also and precisely of the natural, the typical: in contrast to ancient and medieval philosophy, which

understand the extreme by starting from the typical, modern philosophy, in its origin and in all cases where it is not restoring older teachings, understands the typical from the extreme. Thus, by leaving out of account the "trivial" question about the essence and teachability of virtue, the extreme ("theological") virtue of charity becomes the "natural" ("philosophic") virtue; thus the critique of the natural ideal of courage, which the founder of the philosophic tradition had carried out in the context of his discovery of the extreme (and thus in this life unrealizable) ideal of knowledge (cf. esp. Plato, *Protag.* 349D and *Laws* 630C) and in such a way that the character of virtue in courage as such was still admitted, is now "radicalized" in such a way that the character of virtue in courage as such is denied outright; thus the extreme case of the "right of necessity" is made into the foundation of natural right; thus the polemic against the extreme possibility of miracles becomes the foundation of the "idealistic" turn of philosophy. The natural foundation which the Enlightenment aimed for but itself overthrew becomes accessible only if the battle of the Enlightenment against "prejudices,"—which has been pursued principally by empiricism and by modern history—is accordingly brought to a conclusion: only if the Enlightenment critique of the tradition is radicalized, as it was by Nietzsche, into a critique of the principles of the tradition (both the Greek and the Biblical), so that an original understanding of these principles again becomes possible. To that end and only to that end is the "historicizing" of philosophy justified and necessary: only the history of philosophy makes possible the ascent from the second, "unnatural" cave, into which we have fallen less because of the tradition itself than because of the tradition of polemics against the tradition, into that first, "natural" cave which Plato's image depicts, to emerge from which into the light is the original meaning of philosophizing.

3. Here we set aside completely the fact that not even Cohen and Rosenzweig acknowledged the original, non-"internalized" meaning of the basic tenets of the tradition.

4. Concerning Martin Buber's reservations cf. Rosenzweig's exchange with him, reprinted in "Zweistromland," pp. 48 ff.

5. The earliest writings of both Rosenzweig (*Hegel und der Staat*) and Ernst Simon (*Ranke und Hegel*) are devoted to the discussion with Hegel.

6. This observation also refers to by far the most important critique of the Enlightenment that has emerged from the return movement, viz. Cohen's critique of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*. I refer provisionally to my essay "Cohens Analyse der Bibelwissenschaft Spinozas" (*Der Jude VIII*, 1924, pp. 295-314).

7. Lessing, *Gedanken über die Herrnhuter*, in *princ.*

8. On this and the following cf. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, pp. 3 ff., 61, 85, 124 ff., 194 ff. and 200 ff.

9. After this liberty, acquired and legitimated in a questionable enough way, had become a self-evident possession, one could permit oneself to wish to understand the tradition better than it had understood itself, and thus to keep it at a safe distance by means of an ambiguous "reverence." The contemptuous indignation at the Enlightenment's mockery which is correlative to this "reverence" differs from the passionate indignation of orthodoxy in the same way in which the previously-described synthesis differs generally from orthodoxy: the mockery does far greater justice to orthodoxy than the later "reverence" does.

10. That one must distinguish between orthodoxy as such on the one hand, and the statements of many of its apologists and all of its "systematic philosophers" on the other hand, needs no further demonstration.

11. This is the basis of the fact that the Enlightenment could not prove and, insofar as it understood itself, could not even wish to prove the impossibility of miracles but only their unknowability.

12. On this latter point cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Aph. 9.

13. The new probity is somewhat different from the old love of truth: when one speaks of "intellectual conscience," "one means the 'inner' sovereignty of science over man, and not just any science, but modern science" (G. Krüger, *Philosophie und Moral in der Kantischen Kritik*, Tübingen 1931, p. 9 n. 2). The impartiality that characterizes this probity is "the impartiality of not being partial to transcendent ideals" (K. Löwith, "Max Weber und Karl Marx," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 67, pp. 72 ff.). This conception of probity recalls the definition of criticism: "La critique . . . a pour essence la négation du

suraturel." To this it was objected: "L'essence de la critique, c'est l'attention" (A. Gratry, *Les sophistes et la critique*, Paris 1864, p. 9). It is in the sense of this objection that the opposition between probity and love of truth is to be understood: the open avowal that one is an atheist, and the resolute intention of accepting all the consequences, and in particular of rejecting the semi-theism which was the dogmatic and probity-lacking premise of the post-Enlightenment synthesis, with all its implications, as for example the belief in progress—this has doubtless more probity than any compromises or syntheses; but if one makes atheism, which is admittedly not demonstrable, into a positive, dogmatic premise, then the probity expressed by it is something very different from the love of truth.

Chapter 1.

1. Julius Guttman, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Munich 1933). In this essay, the numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers of Guttman's *Philosophie des Judentums*. Numbers preceded by an "R" refer to the pages of Guttman's work *Religion und Wissenschaft im mittelalterlichen und im modernen Denken* (Berlin 1922).

2. The other crux of philosophy of culture is the fact of the political (cf. my "Anmerkungen zu Carl Schmitt, Der Begriff des Politischen," *Arch. für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 67, pp. 732 ff.). If "religion" and "politics" are the facts that transcend "culture," or, to speak more precisely, the *original* facts, then the radical critique of the concept of "culture" is possible only in the form of a "theologico-political treatise,"—which of course, if it is not to lead back again to the foundation of "culture," must take exactly the opposite direction from the theologico-political treatises of the seventeenth century, especially those of Hobbes and Spinoza. The first condition for this would be, of course, that these seventeenth-century works no longer be understood, as they almost always have been up to now, within the horizon of philosophy of culture.

3. The most important exception, according to Guttman's presentation, is the teaching of Saadia, which "holds fast throughout to the essential content of the Jewish premises of belief" (84). But—entirely apart from the fact that Saadia's doctrine of attributes, "followed to its final consequences," leads to